

Control of Weeds in Wildlife Food Plots

Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry

Weed competition in wildlife food plots may threaten your plantings. Some infestations may be light enough to tolerate, or to control satisfactorily by mowing, by planting tall grains that will compete with the weeds, or both. Mowing is an option with clovers, which respond well to cutting. Corn or sorghum planted after two plowings (in early- and mid-spring) might outgrow the competition.

Herbicides will usually be your best bet to control a serious infestation. The first step is to identify the weeds, then select the herbicides. There are dozens of brands on the market, but we will use as an example three that have wide use and brand-name recognition. 2,4-D, an ingredient of many herbicides, controls broadleaf weeds without affecting grasses like millet, corn or wheat. (Note: do not use 2,4-D around walnuts.) Grasses can be controlled by Poast and similar formulations without harming broadleaves. Roundup (glyphosate) kills both broadleaves and grasses.

It is very desirable to plan ahead so that timing will be right. Observe what grew on the plot last year. If grass was the main problem, plant a broadleaf forage crop and treat with a grass-specific herbicide like Poast. If broadleaves are the main problem, plant grasses and spray with a herbicide containing 2,4-D. If both are serious problems, spray with Roundup or similar broad-spectrum herbicide prior to planting. Time application of herbicides to kill weeds before they seed.

The ideal way to plant after spraying with Roundup is with a no-till seed drill, since plowing or harrowing will turn up more weed seeds. But if you don't have the right equipment, spray, plow, wait two weeks, plow again, and plant.

A backpack sprayer is practical only for small openings and roadsides. For larger openings, a sprayer equipped with a boom and fan nozzles is called for. Such a sprayer can be mounted on a pickup, tractor or ATV and will cost between \$150 and \$2,000. Herbicide application costs will run \$15 to \$50 per acre.